

Chamorro language

Chamorro /tʃəˈmɒroʊ/^[3] (Chamorro: *Finu ʻ Chamoru*) is an Austronesian language spoken by about 58,000 people (about 25,800 people on Guam and about 32,200 in the rest of the Mariana Islands and elsewhere).^[4] It is the native and spoken language of the Chamorro people, who are the indigenous people of the Marianas (Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, both US territories).

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Classification

Unlike most of its neighbors, Chamorro is not classified as a Micronesian or Polynesian language. Rather, like Palauan, it possibly constitutes an independent branch of the Malayo-Polynesian language family.^{[5][6]}

At the time the Spanish rule over Guam ended, it was thought that Chamorro was a semi-Creole language, with a substantial amount of the vocabulary of Spanish origin and beginning to have a high level of mutual intelligibility with Spanish. It is reported that even in the early 1920s Spanish was reported to be a living language in Guam for commercial transactions, but the use of Spanish and Chamorro was rapidly declining as a result of English pressure.

Spanish influences in the language exist due to three centuries of Spanish colonial rule. Many words in the Chamorro lexicon are of Latin etymological origin via Spanish, but their use conforms with indigenous grammatical structures.

Chamorro	
<i>Finu ʻ Chamoru</i>	
Native to	Mariana Islands
Ethnicity	Chamorro
Native speakers	58,000 (2005–2015) ^[1]
Language family	Austronesian <ul style="list-style-type: none">Malayo-Polynesian<ul style="list-style-type: none">Chamorro
Official status	
Official language in	 Guam Northern Mariana Islands
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	ch (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=ch)
ISO 639-2	cha (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=79)
ISO 639-3	cha
Glottolog	cham1312 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/cham1312) ^[2]
	

Furthermore, indigenous pronunciation has "nativized" most words of foreign origin that haven't conformed to the ways that indigenous speakers of the language are accustomed to making sounds. By some, it may be considered a mixed language^[7] under a historical point of view, even though it remains independent and unique. In his *Chamorro Reference Grammar*, Donald M. Topping states:

"The most notable influence on Chamorro language and culture came from the Spanish. ... There was wholesale borrowing of Spanish words and phrases into Chamorro, and there was even some borrowing from the Spanish sound system. But this borrowing was linguistically superficial. The bones of the Chamorro language remained intact. ... In virtually all cases of borrowing, Spanish words were forced to conform to the Chamorro sound system. ... While Spanish may have left a lasting mark on Chamorro vocabulary, as it did on many Philippine and South American languages, it had virtually no effect on Chamorro grammar. ... Japanese influence on Chamorro was much greater than that of German but much less than Spanish. Once again, the linguistic influence was restricted exclusively to vocabulary items, many of which refer to manufactured objects..."^[8]

In contrast, in the essays found in *Del español al chamorro. Lenguas en contacto en el Pacífico* (2009), Rafael Rodríguez-Ponga refers to modern Chamorro as a "mixed language" of "Hispanic-Austronesian" origins, while estimating that approximately 50% of the Chamorro lexicon comes from the Spanish language and that the contribution of this language goes far beyond loanwords.

Rodríguez-Ponga (1995) considers Chamorro a Spanish-Austronesian or a Spanish-Austronesian mixed language or at least a language that has emerged from a process of contact and *creolization* on the island of Guam, since modern Chamorro is influenced in vocabulary, and it has in its grammar many elements of Spanish origin: verbs, articles, prepositions, numerals, conjunctions, etc.^[9]

This process, which began in the 17th century and ended in the early 20th century, meant a profound change from the old Chamorro (paleo-Chamorro) to modern Chamorro (neo-Chamorro) in its grammar, phonology and vocabulary.^[10]

Speakers

The Chamorro language is threatened, with a precipitous drop in language fluency over the past century. It is estimated that 75% of the population of Guam was literate in the Chamorro language around the time the United States captured the island during the Spanish–American War^[11] (there are no similar language fluency estimates for other areas of the Mariana Islands during this time). A century later, the 2000 U.S. Census showed that fewer than 20% of Chamorros living in Guam speak their heritage language fluently, and the vast majority of those were over the age of 55.

A number of forces have contributed to the steep, post-World War II decline of Chamorro language fluency. There is a long history of colonization in the Marianas, beginning with the Spanish colonization in 1668 and, eventually, the American acquisition of the islands in 1898 (whose hegemony continues to this day). This imposed power structures privileging the language of the region's colonizers. According to estimates, a large majority, as stated above (75%), maintained active knowledge of the Chamorro language even during the Spanish colonial era, but this was all to change with the advent of American imperialism and enforcement of the English language.

In Guam, the language suffered additional suppression when the U.S. government banned the Chamorro language in schools and workplaces in 1922. They collected and burned all Chamorro dictionaries.^[12] Similar policies were undertaken by the Japanese government when they controlled the region during World War II. After World War II, when Guam was recaptured by the United States, the American administrators of the island continued to impose "no Chamorro" language restrictions in local schools, teaching only English and disciplining students for speaking their indigenous tongue.^[13]

Even though these oppressive language policies were progressively lifted, Chamorro usage had substantially decreased. Subsequent generations were often raised in households where only the oldest family members were fluent. Lack of exposure made it increasingly difficult to pick up Chamorro as a second language. Within a few generations, English replaced Chamorro as the language of daily life.



"Hafa Adai" sign at Antonio B. Won Pat International Airport in Guam

There is a difference in the rate of Chamorro language fluency between Guam and the rest of the Marianas. On Guam (called *Guåhan* by Chamorro speakers, from the word *guaha*, meaning "have"; its English gloss "We have" references the island's providing everything needed to live^{[14][15]}) the number of native Chamorro speakers has dwindled in the last decade or so. In the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI), young Chamorros speak the language fluently. Chamorro is common among Chamorro households in the Northern Marianas, but fluency has greatly decreased among Guamanian Chamorros during the years of American rule in favor of American English, which is commonplace throughout the inhabited Marianas.

Today, NMI Chamorros and Guamanian Chamorros disagree strongly on each other's linguistic fluency. An NMI Chamorro would say that Guamanian Chamorros speak the language incorrectly or speak "broken Chamorro", whereas a Guamanian Chamorro might consider the form used by NMI Chamorros to be archaic.

Revitalization efforts

Representatives from Guam have unsuccessfully lobbied the United States to take action to promote and protect the language.

In 2013, "Guam will be instituting Public Law 31-45 (https://web.archive.org/web/20150924024021/http://www.guamlegislature.org/Public_Laws_31st/P.L.%2031-45%20SBill%20No.%2095-31.pdf), which increases the teaching of the Chamorro language and culture in Guam schools," extending instruction to include grades 7–10.^[16]

Other efforts have been made in recent times, most notably Chamorro immersion schools. One example is the Huråo Guåhan Academy, at the Chamorro Village in Hagåtña, GU. This program is led by Ann Marie Arceo and her husband, Ray Arceo. According to Huråo's official YouTube page, "Huråo Academy is one if not the first Chamoru Immersion Schools that focus on the teaching of Chamoru language and Self-identity on Guam. Huråo was founded as a non-profit in June 2005."^[17] The academy has been praised by many for the continuity of the Chamoru language.

Other creative ways to incorporate and promote the Chamorro language have been found in the use of applications for smartphones, internet videos and television. From Chamorro dictionaries,^[18] to the most recent "Speak Chamorro" app,^[19] efforts are growing and expanding in ways to preserve and protect the Chamorro language and identity.

On YouTube, a popular Chamorro soap opera *Siha*^[20] has received mostly positive feedback from native Chamorro speakers on its ability to weave dramatics, the Chamorro language, and island culture into an entertaining program. On TV, *Nihi! Kids* is a first-of-its-kind show, because it is targeted "for Guam's nenis that aims to perpetuate Chamoru language and culture while encouraging environmental stewardship, healthy choices and character development."^[21]

Phonology

Chamorro has 24 phonemes: 18 are consonants and 6 are vowels.

Vowels

Chamorro has at least 6 vowels, which include:

- /ɑ/, open back unrounded vowel equivalent to the "a" in "father."
- /æ/, near-open front unrounded vowel equivalent to the "a" in "cat."
- /e/, close-mid front unrounded vowel equivalent to the "e" in the Received Pronunciation of "met".
- /i/, close front unrounded vowel equivalent to the "ee" in "sleep."
- /o/, close-mid back unrounded vowel equivalent to the "o" in "corn."
- /u/, close back rounded vowel equivalent to the "u" in "flu."

Consonants

Below is a chart of Chamorro consonants; all are unaspirated.

Table of consonant phonemes of Chamorro

	<u>Labial</u>	<u>Dental/ Alveolar</u>	<u>Palatal</u>	<u>Velar</u>	<u>Glottal</u>
<u>Stop</u>	p b	t d		k g g ^w	ʔ
<u>Nasal</u>	m	n	ɲ	ŋ	
<u>Fricative</u>	f	s			h
<u>Affricate</u>		t͡ʃ d͡ʒ			
<u>Tap</u>		ɾ ~ ɽ			
<u>Approximant</u>	(w)	l			

- /w/ does not occur initially.
- Affricates /t͡ʃ d͡ʒ/ can be realized as palatal [t͡ɕ d͡ʒ] before non-low front vowels.^[22]

Grammar

Chamorro is a VSO or verb–subject–object language. However, the word order can be very flexible and so change to SVO (subject-verb-object), like English, if necessary to convey different types of relative clauses depending on context and stressing parts of what someone is trying to say or convey. Again, this is subject to debate as those on Guam believe the language is flexible whereas those in the CNMI do not.

Chamorro is also an agglutinative language, grammatically allowing root words to be modified by a number of affixes. For example, *masanganenñaihon* "talked awhile (with/to)", passive marking prefix *ma-*, root verb *sangan*, referential suffix *i* "to" (forced morphophonemically to change to *e*) with excrescent consonant *n*, and suffix *ñaihon* "a short amount of time". Thus *Masanganenñaihon gui* 'He/she was told (something) for a while'.

Chamorro has many Spanish loanwords and other words have Spanish etymological roots (e.g., *tenda* "shop/store" from Spanish *tienda*), which may lead some to mistakenly conclude that the language is a Spanish Creole: Chamorro very much uses its loanwords in a Micronesian way (e.g., *bumobola* "playing ball" from *bola* "ball, play ball" with verbalizing infix -*um-* and reduplication of the first syllable of root).

Chamorro is a predicate-initial, head-marking language. It has a rich agreement system in the nominal and in the verbal domains.

Chamorro is also known for its wh-agreement in the verb: These agreement morphemes agree with features (roughly, the grammatical case feature) of the question phrase, and *replace* the regular subject–verb agreement:^[23]

(1) Ha-fa' gasi si Juan i kareta.
3sSA^[a]-wash PND^[b] Juan the car

'Juan washed the car.'

(2) Hayi fuma' gasi i kareta?
who? WH[nom].^[c] wash the car

'Who washed the car?'

Pronouns

The following set of pronouns are the pronouns found in the Chamorro language:^[24]

	Free	Absolutive	Agentive	Irrealis nominative	Possessive
1st person singular	guahu	yo´	hu	(bai) hu	-hu/-ku
2nd person singular	hago	hao´	un	un	-mu
3rd person singular	guiya	gue´	ha	u	-ña
1st person plural inclusive	hita	hit	ta	(u) ta	-ta
1st person plural exclusive	hami	ham	in	(bai) in	-mami
2nd person plural	hamyo	hamyo	en	en	-miyu
3rd person plural	siha	siha	ma	uha/u/uma	-ñiha

Orthography

Chamorro Alphabet

	A	Â	B	Ch	D	E	F	G	H	I	K	L	M	N	Ñ	Ng	O	P	R	S	T	U	Y y
	a	â	b	ch	d	e	f	g	h	i	k	l	m	n	ñ	ng	o	p	r	s	t	u	y y
/ʔ/ (glottal stop)	/æ/	/ɑ/	/b/	/ts/ and /tʃ/	/d/	/e/	/f/	/g/	/h/	/i/	/k/	/l/	/m/	/n/	/ɲ/	/ŋ/	/o/	/p/	/r/	/s/	/t/	/u/	/dz/, /z/ and /dʒ/

Additionally, some letter combinations in Chamoru sometimes represent single phonemes. For instance, "ci+[vowel]" and "ti+[vowel]" are both pronounced [ʃ], as in "hustisia" (*justice*) and the surname *Concepcion* (Spanish influence).

The letter ⟨y⟩ is usually (though not always) pronounced more like *dz* (an approximation of the regional Spanish pronunciation of *y* as [dʒ]); it is also sometimes used to represent the same sound as the letter *i* by Guamanian speakers. The phonemes represented by ⟨n⟩ and ⟨ñ⟩ as well as ⟨a⟩ and ⟨â⟩ are not always distinguished in print. Thus the Guamanian place name spelled *Yona* is pronounced "Dzonìa"/[dʒoɲa], not *[jona] as might be expected. ⟨Ch⟩ is usually pronounced like *ts* rather than like English *ch*. Chamorro ⟨r⟩ is usually a flap [ɾ], like Spanish *r* between vowels, and a retroflex approximant [ɻ], like English *r*, at the beginning of words.

Chamorro has geminate consonants which are written double (GG, DD, KK, MM, NGNG, PP, SS, TT), native diphthongs AI and AO, plus OI, OE, IA, IU, IE in loanwords; penultimate stress, except where marked otherwise, if marked at all in writing, usually with an acute accent, as in *asút* "blue" or *dáŋkulu* "big". Unstressed vowels are limited to /ə i u/, though they are often spelled A E O. Syllables may be consonant-vowel-consonant, as in *che’lu* "sibling", *diskâtga* "unload", *mamâhlão* "shy", or *oppop* "lie face down", *gâtus* (Old Chamorro word for 100), *Haqâtña* (Capital of Guam); B, D, and G are not distinguished from P, T, and K in that position..

Today, there is an ongoing issue on the Chamorro language orthography between NMI Chamorros and Guamanian Chamorros (example: Mt. Tapochau vs. Mt. Tapochao). There is also a movement on Guam to capitalize both letters in a digraph such as "CH" in words like "CHamoru" (Guamanian spelling) or "CHe’lu", which NMI Chamorros find silly.

Vocabulary

Numbers

Current common Chamorro uses only the number words of Spanish origin: uno, dos, tres, etc. Old Chamorro used different number words based on categories: "Basic numbers" (for date, time, etc.), "living things", "inanimate things", and "long objects".

English	Modern Chamorro	Old Chamorro			
		Basic Numbers	Living Things	Inanimate Things	Long Objects
one	unu/una (time)	håcha	maisa	hachiyai	takhachun
two	dos	hugua	hugua	hugiyai	takhuguan
three	tres	tulu	tatu	to' giyai	taktulun
four	kuåttru'	fatfat	fatfat	fatfatai	takfatun
five	singku'	lima	lalima	limiyai	takliman
six	sais	gunum	guagunum	gonmiyai	ta' gunum
seven	sietti	fiti	fafiti	fitgiyai	takfitun
eight	ochu'	guålu'	guagualu	guatgiyai	ta' gualun
nine	nuebi	sigua	sasigua	sigiyai	taksiguan
ten	dies	månot	maonot	manutai	takmaonton
hundred	siento	gåtus	gåtus	gåtus	gåtus/manapo

- The number 10 and its multiples up to 90 are dies (10), benti (20), trenta (30), kuårenta (40), sinkuenta (50), sisenta (60), sitenta (70), ochenta (80), nubenta (90). These are similar to the corresponding Spanish terms diez (10), veinte (20), treinta (30), cuarenta (40), cincuenta (50), sesenta (60), setenta (70), ochenta (80), noventa (90).

Months

Before the Spanish-based 12-month calendar became predominant, the Chamoru 13-month lunar calendar was commonly used. The first month in the left column below corresponds with January. On the right are the Spanish-based months.

1	Tumaiguini
2	Maimu'
3	Umatalaf
4	Lumuhu
5	Makmamao
6	Fananaf/Mananaf
7	Semu
8	Tenhos
9	Lumamlam
10	Fangualu/Fa' gualu
11	Sumongsong
12	Umayanggan
13	Umagahaf

January	Ineru
February	Fibreru
March	Måtsu
April	Abrit
May	Måyu
June	Huño
July	Hulio
August	Agosto
September	Septembre
October	Oktubri
November	Nubembre
December	Disembre

[25]

Basic phrases

Håfa adai! / Håfa dai! (phonetic spelling)	"Hello!"	Adios [Spanish introduced] påt Esta	<i>Good bye.</i>	Asta [Spanish introduced from <i>hasta</i>] agupa'	<i>Until tomorrow</i>
Buenas [Spanish]	<i>Greetings</i>	Pot Fabot [Spanish introduced formal] påt Fan	<i>please</i>		<i>Thank you (lit:</i>


introduced]		[Chamoru Informal]		Si Yu'us ma'âsi' pat Mit Gracias	God have mercy)
Kao mamaolek hao?	<i>How are you? [lit.: Are you doing well?] [informal]</i>	Fanatatti [Indigenous]	<i>leave later [informal]</i>	Buen probachu [Spanish introduced] pât Hâgu mäs	"You're welcome"
Hâfa tatatmanu hao?	<i>How are you? [formal]</i>	Buenas dias [Spanish introduced] pât Manana si Yu'us (mostly used on Guam)	<i>Good morning.</i>		
Hâyi na'ân mu?	<i>What is your name?</i>	Buenas tâtdes [Spanish introduced]	<i>Good afternoon.</i>		
I na'ân hu si Chris	<i>My name is Chris.</i>	Buenas noches [Spanish introduced] pât Puengen Yu'us	<i>Good night.</i>		
Ñâlang yu'	<i>I'm hungry.</i>				
Mâ'o yu'	<i>I'm thirsty.</i>				

Chamorro studies

Chamorro is studied at the [University of Guam](#) and in several academic institutions of Guam and the Northern Marianas.

Researchers in several countries are studying aspects of Chamorro. In 2009, the Chamorro Linguistics International Network (CHIN) was established in Bremen, Germany. CHiN was founded on the occasion of the Chamorro Day (27 September 2009) which was part of the programme of the Festival of Languages. The foundation ceremony was attended by people from Germany, Guam, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States of America.^[26]

See also

-  [Language portal](#)

Footnotes

- 3rd singular Subject Agreement
- "Proper Noun Determiner", a special article used with names in Chamorro.
- Here, the **infix** *-um-* is a WH-agreement morpheme for nominative question phrases.

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